

U.S. DROPS PLANS FOR 1965 RECALL OF VIETNAM FORCE

McNamara Assures Junta
Troops Will Stay as Long
as Wanted and Needed

JOHNSON SENDS PLEDGE

Washington Also Disavows
Any Interest in Proposals
to Neutralize Country

By HEDRICK SMITH

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Dec. 20—Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara gave South Vietnam's leaders a pledge of support from President Johnson today. The United States will back the war against Communist guerrillas as long as its help is needed and wanted, the Vietnamese leaders were told.

According to reliable sources, the message did not specifically mention any date for the withdrawal of American forces, but in effect it eliminated the previously announced goal of withdrawing most of them by the end of 1965.

Secretary McNamara also sought to allay Vietnamese fears that the United States might permit proposals for neutralizing Vietnam to become the subject of a possible international conference on Cambodian neutrality.

Salgon Fears Conference

Vietnamese leaders have feared that if such a conference were held, it would seriously undercut the morale of the Vietnamese Army and help fan support here for a neutral Vietnam.

Mr. McNamara delivered President Johnson's assurances orally in a closed session with Maj. Gen. Duong Van Minh, chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council, and other leaders of the ruling junta.

Even before today, key Unit-

ed States officials were saying privately that with a recent sharp deterioration in the war effort, the 1965 troop-withdrawal goal was unrealistic.

Some diplomatic observers maintained that the goal, announced by the White House early in October, was never meant as an inflexible commitment. They suggested that it was intended primarily for domestic political purposes.

In today's meeting the generals were reported to have asked Mr. McNamara about an

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General Minh's right-hand man, Nguyen Ngoc Tho, Premier of the provisional Government, also attended.

Earlier, most of the junta—15 generals—attended a two-hour session of free give and take.

After the final meeting, which lasted an hour, Mr. McNamara held a closing strategy conference with United States officials at their military command headquarters. In the evening he left on an Air Force jet for Honolulu.

Before boarding his plane, Mr. McNamara issued a terse statement that was considered reserved and cautious in its comments about the course of

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editorial in The New York Times Dec. 8, suggesting discussions on Vietnamese neutrality.

The generals wanted to know whether this represented Washington's policy, and they were given assurances that it did not. United States officials were reported to have said that if a conference about Cambodia were held, Washington would insist that it be limited to Cambodia and that the conference would not mean any change in the United States' commitment to the war here.

But these assurances were understood to have fallen short of a categorical declaration that the United States would not under any circumstances back or attend a conference on Cambodian neutrality.

3 Meetings Are Held

Mr. McNamara met three times with the junta leaders last night and today. The sessions were also attended by Henry Cabot Lodge, the United States Ambassador; John A. McCone, director of the Central Intelligence Agency; William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs; and Gen. Paul D. Harkins, commander of the United States forces in South Vietnam.

In the final session at General Minh's office, Mr. McNamara, Mr. McCone and Mr. Lodge met privately with General Minh and two other junta leaders—Maj. Gen. Tran Van Don, the Defense Minister, and Maj. Gen. Le Van Kim, secretary general of the junta, who is considered



Associated Press Cablephoto

ANTI-FRENCH DEMONSTRATION: South Vietnamese students hold demonstration outside French Embassy in Saigon to protest President de Gaulle's suggestion for a neutralized and reunified Vietnam. The sign held by the demonstrator in front reads, "Down With de Gaulle."

the war.

Optimism Is Qualified

Mr. McNamara said he had thoroughly discussed with United States officials the American program for "providing training and logistical support to the South Vietnamese war effort" and had heard the Vietnamese generals "explain in detail their program for 1964."

Although Mr. McNamara said he was "optimistic as to the progress that can be made during the coming year," he carefully qualified his optimism and avoided expressing confidence that the war situation would improve.

The issue of Vietnamese neutrality also aroused a demonstration in Saigon today. Several thousand Vietnamese students, in a light-hearted mood, marched on the French Embassy to demonstrate against President de Gaulle's proposals

for neutrality and unification with Communist North Vietnam.

One student said, "We'd like to do a Jakarta," a reference to the recent sacking and burning of the British Embassy in Jakarta by Indonesian demonstrators opposed to Malaysia. But there was no violence.

The crowd, composed of boys and girls from the Government-run high schools and Saigon University students, was shouting, cheering and laughing as it trooped along the sunny boulevards, first to the embassy and then to the French Cultural Center.

After about an hour three student leaders, escorted by four Vietnamese soldiers and two police commissioners, went to the embassy gate and asked to present a statement to French officials. They saw the chargé d'affaires, Georges Perruche.

Battle Pace Accelerated

SAIGON, Dec. 20 (AP) — Secretary McNamara will confer in Honolulu with Adm. Harry D. Felt, commander of Unit-

ed States forces in the Pacific, and will then return to Washington.

During his visit here, South Vietnamese forces stepped up their activity against the Vietcong guerrillas. An American spokesman said that there had been no significant contact, but that "with major operations in the Mekong delta and north of Saigon, we can expect fireworks in the near future."

There are reports that the ruling junta, which has been accused by some United States officials of concentrating on politics at the expense of the war, is planning now to change its tactics and concentrate striking power in key regions until they are fully pacified.

Some regions — particularly the Mekong delta and the country's southern tip, where the Communist hold is strongest — would be left temporarily under the control of the Vietcong.

"But this won't be for long," a Vietnamese officer said. "As we pacify the key regions, we will move out and get them."

A United States spokesman put the American combat-death toll at 89 after an unsuccessful search for the pilot of a fighter-bomber that crashed on a dive-bombing run early in October.

Secretary Reaches Honolulu

HONOLULU, Dec. 20 (AP) — Secretary McNamara arrived from Saigon today and sidestepped questions about his reassessment of the war in South Vietnam.